

Promising Practice: Creative Job Development Strategies

Southland Health Care Forum

Pathways to Health Care Occupations

Pathways to Health Care Occupations is a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program, funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance. This program of the Southland Health Care Forum (SHCF) has developed placement and employer engagement strategies that have been successful for its participants and are a promising practice for other HPOG grantees.

According to this program's job developer, Dionis Harvey, a full evaluation of the participant's current home situation is critical to successful placement. SHCF sees its role as not only training participants in healthcare occupations, but also leading them through a whole-person lifestyle change. Program staff work with participants to help them anticipate the needs, problems, and changes in their lives that could become barriers to successfully finding a job.

SHCF strives to provide participants with opportunities to meet with employers in person before they graduate. Employers are invited to monthly student orientations so they can learn more about HPOG and interact with the staff, instructors, and participants, seeing face-to-face the people who will be entering the workforce. SHCF also invites employers to career development workshops and job clubs where students conduct mock interviews.

Program staff share wage information for occupations and ensure participants have realistic expectations for entry-level jobs. Participants learn that they may have to work night shifts or work in institutions other than major hospitals, and that the healthcare field is not the way it looks on television—it's hard work!

In a way, HPOG programs have two clients—participants, of course, but employers as well. A job developer can read the mission statement of an employer to learn about the employer's values, then attempt to place students who have similar values with that employer. This strategy is much more likely to be successful than sending a deluge of résumés, and it encourages both the job developer and the student to research the employer, which is an important part of the job search process in itself.

Programs should have a customer service mindset when working with employers, striving to send them the people they need, not the people you want to place. Social media or professional networking sites like Linked-In can be used to re-engage with employers. Having participants create Linked-In accounts, with virtual résumés that can easily be forwarded with the click of a button, makes it easier for employers to work with the résumés than sending them hard copies.

SHCF's HPOG program staff collaborate to make placements, but placement can also be considered a responsibility shared by the student and the job developer. The participants have

to do their part to prepare for the application and interview process, but the job developer keeps the participants on track and provides guidance. The job developer also has an ongoing relationship with the employer, which is critical. Career fairs represent a networking opportunity for both participants and job developers.

SHCF maintains a spreadsheet with information about local employers. A quarterly scan of employers is used to stay abreast of which employers are hiring. Networking with job developers from career centers and other community-based organizations can be helpful; programs can collaborate rather than compete. SHCF keeps geography in mind when making placements, attempting to place participants in their communities. It keeps a job developer manual as a guide for these strategies.

When a participant starts a new job in their healthcare career, it is an important milestone to celebrate. The SHCF team recognizes the value of congratulating participants on finding their new jobs, but also appreciates that job retention is just as important as placement. The team is available to participants and employers, especially during the transition-to-work period. Graduating participants are encouraged to reach out to program staff with any problems. SHCF often asks graduates to come back to speak to new participants.

SHCF hosts employer appreciation breakfasts to recognize employers for their contributions to workshop partnerships. At these events, the HPOG program's top participants present awards to employers so they know they are true partners who share in program and student successes.

What can HPOG program staff do when they are struggling with placements or feeling bogged down? Be creative and try new ideas. For example, video interviews and video introductions are becoming more popular. HPOG programs can help participants create videos about themselves, which can be placed in their Linked-In profiles. Another idea is setting up informational interviews with employers that are new or that the program has not worked with yet. When placing Registered Nurses, find out which employers have new graduate hiring programs.

Finally, it is important to recognize that the learning process does not need to end with finding a job. Participants will want to advance on career ladders and receive ongoing education and training, and they will need it to have successful careers.